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SOME LATE

OPINIONS

Concerning the

FOUNDATION of MORALITY,

EXAMINED.

In a LETTER to a FRIEND.

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IN the preſent indolent ſtate of learning, when writing goes on without labour, and reading without profit, a new ſpecies of compoſition has become faſhionable; which, not being honoured with a peculiar name, borrows from it's form the appellation of A letter to a friend.----A happy invention for writers, who have not courage to undertake a regular work. One of this ſort, when ſeized by a fond fit of ambition to become an author, has an eaſy paſſage to fame by a familiar addreſs to the public, under the character of an intimate acquaintance.

Probably

Probably the following letter will be conſidered as a work of this kind; and, but for one reaſon, the miſtake ſhould paſs, for there is no harm in it. The reaſon is, that the Perſon, to whom the letter was really addreſſed, reckoned himſelf ſo much indebted to the writer, that he could not deny himſelf the ſatisfaction of making a ſort of public acknowledgment. And he was the more readily induced to do this, becauſe the loſs of ſo valuable a friend has now left him no other means to teſtify his gratitude.

SOME LATE

OPINIONS

Concerning the

FOUNDATION of MORALITY, EXAMINED.

In a LETTER to a FRIEND.

SIR,

THE turn you have taken of late to moral ſpeculations gives pleaſure to your friends. You certainly cannot employ your preſent retirement better, than in ſuch ſtudies as have a direct reference to human nature, and to the conduct of life. Morality, as you well obſerve, juſtly lays claim to

the firſt place among the ſciences, becauſe of the importance of its end, which is, to regulate our behaviour. And therefore it concerns mankind to have the principles of this ſcience, above all others, eſtabliſhed in a ſatisfactory manner; and to have the conſequences of theſe principles deduced with clearneſs and accuracy. In many other parts of knowledge we may be miſtaken, without any conſiderable prejudice to ourſelves: but in moral ſyſtems, any error, at leaſt any capital error, ought not to be regarded with indifference; becauſe it may draw conſequences after it affecting the conduct of life. The accurate examination which, upon this account, you propoſe of the theories of morality advanced by ſeveral authors, I very much approve of: and as you are pleaſed to think I can be of ſervice to you in this examination, you may be aſſured I ſhall not decline giving you any aſſiſtance that is in my power. It is what I owe to the memory of your father, and it is

what

what I cannot deny to the goodneſs of your own diſpoſition, had I no other motive.

Two books you particularly mention lately publiſhed, which, by their ſingularity and novelty, have engaged your attention; the one entitled, *Eſſays on the principles of Morality and natural Religion, in two parts; by an anonymous author:* the other, *An Enquiry concerning the principles of Morals, by* David Hume *Eſq.* I have read both with care; and ſhall communicate to you the obſervations I have made.

To begin with the former. The author has diſcovered a bold and penetrating genius; and has advanced many things new and curious. In ſome points I cannot agree with him. His ſpeculations concerning liberty and neceſſity, in pa ticular, are liable, in my opinion, to ſeveral ſtrong objections. But this is what I ſhall not at preſent inquire into,

as it is only his treatiſe concerning the law of nature, and the foundation of virtue, which I now mean to conſider. And here I muſt confeſs he has afforded me a great deal of entertainment. Though he has not writ a profeſſed ſyſtem, yet he has given more openings into the ſubject, and has ſet it in a juſter light than any other author I know. He traces the ſeveral feelings of human nature which relate to morality, and aſcertains their different degrees of authority. In my opinion his merit is great, were it only for ſtating ſo clearly the ſentiment of duty, or moral obligation; and diſtinguiſhing it from the ſentiment of ſimple moral approbation. The want of this diſtinction appeared always to me a great defect in former authors, who acknowledged an internal ſenſe to be the foundation of morality. In benevolence they compriſe the whole of virtue; and, confounding obligation with a mere approbatory ſentiment, they ſuppoſe mankind to be under the ſtricteſt obligation

to

to the higheſt acts of benevolence; becauſe ſuch actions produce the higheſt approbation. In this, their ſyſtems have the misfortune to contradict nature and experience; and therefore have undoubtedly a dangerous tendency. For no man, after he is diſmiſſed from the ſchools of philoſophy, and begins to act his part in life, can in any degree act upon ſuch a plan as theſe philoſophers lay down; and hence is too apt to conſider the whole of virtue as a romance or chimera. He will indeed feel himſelf inwardly bound to a ſtrict obſervance of the rules of juſtice and honeſty; but will never be conſcious of a perpetual obligation to exert, on every occaſion, the higheſt acts of generoſity and benevolence. Here then our author makes a diſtinction which is certainly founded in nature and truth; and which ſerves not a little to illuſtrate the wiſdom of the human conſtitution. He obſerves, that indeed the higheſt approbatory pleaſure attends generous and benevolent

actions;

actions; but that as juſtice, truth, fidelity and gratitude are more neceſſary to the ſupport of human ſociety; ſo, to theſe virtues only belongs the ſentiment of ſtrict moral obligation. The peculiarity of this ſentiment, as expreſſed by the words, *ought* and *ſhould*, our author diſtinctly explains, and ſhews how it is to be diſtinguiſhed from ſimple approbation by the ſanction of ſelf-condemnation and remorſe.

As this author has thus analyſed the moral ſenſe to better purpoſe, in my judgment, than had been done before him; ſo, in treating of our principles of action, he has thrown new light upon the affection of univerſal benevolence. He has very juſtly obſerved, that though there are principles in our nature exciting us to compaſſion, to gratitude and to friendſhip; yet, where there are no circumſtances to awaken or engage the mind, we reſt in a ſtate of indifference, and are not conſcious either of benevolence

lence or malevolence to an unknown perſon. The moraliſts, therefore, who require us to lay aſide all partial affection, and to act upon a principle of general benevolence to all men, require us to act upon a principle which, in truth, has no place in human nature. Providence has more wiſely contrived it, that, though our benevolence to individuals gradually decreaſes according to their diſtance, 'till at laſt it dwindles away to nothing, yet, when theſe individuals are collected into one body, and conſidered as a general object, benevolence rekindles towards them in the higheſt degree; and our country, our government, or mankind in general, are objects capable of raiſing the warmeſt feelings of zeal or public ſpirit. The attention which our author has ſhewn to trace the final cauſes of this and the other phænomena which he points out in human nature, recommends his ſpeculations to me the more, as tending to confirm and promote an admiration

of nature and providence; an end which it is highly worthy of every philoſopher to keep in view, if he expects that mankind ſhould be made truly better by any of his ſpeculations. The delineation which the author has given of the laws of nature, I cannot but think extremely conſonant to the natural feelings and ſentiments of men. But it is needleſs to inſiſt any longer upon this treatiſe, as there does not ſeem to be any difference of opinion betwixt us about it: and I entirely agree with you, that it is worthy of your repeated peruſal.

To proceed then to the *Enquiry into the principles of morals*; I am of the ſame mind with you, that the author is a very agreeable writer, and diſcovers an uncommon genius. You ſeem pleaſed with him for having reduced the ſyſtem of morals into a narrow compaſs, by reſolving the whole into a ſingle principle. But here we muſt differ; for I am afraid, the love of ſimplicity has betrayed him,

as it has many before him, into conſiderable errors. Patiently to inveſtigate facts is doing a great deal; and very often is all that can be done: but to build ſyſtems, and to trace firſt principles, is too much for us to attempt in moſt ſciences; and the appetite for it commonly diverts the mind from the fair and unbiaſſed view of facts. Let us examine a little how this author has ſucceeded in ſome of the chief parts of his theory.

Utility is his favourite and capital principle, to which he reduces all the ſeveral branches of morals. With regard to benevolence, he admits of a moral ſenſe which may produce an immediate and inſtinctive approbation of it; but with regard to juſtice, his notions are very ſingular. He denies that we have any natural ſenſe or approbation of juſtice: he aſſerts it to be an artificial virtue, of which public utility is the ſole foundation: and a great part of his treatiſe is employed in proving this.

This part of his doctrine I ſee has ſtaggered you, nor without reaſon; for to me it appears not only ill founded, but even of dangerous tendency; and it puts juſtice, which of all virtues is the moſt neceſſary and fundamental to ſociety, on a more looſe and precarious bottom than the reſt; and ſomehow degrades it into a lower claſs, and diſtinguiſhes it in a diſhonourable manner. The author, of whom we were treating before, has a whole chapter upon this ſubject, in his eſſay on the laws of nature; in which, I think, he has clearly proved, that juſtice has a deeper foundation in our nature than mere reflexion on its utility. I confeſs it ſurpriſes me how a philoſopher, who admits of a natural and immediate approbation as belonging to any virtue, ſhould refuſe this privilege to juſtice. For to me it ſeems clear, that no ſentiment, no inſtinct, is ſo early obſerved in children, and ſo univerſally prevalent among all nations, even the moſt ſavage, as a notion of property,

property, a ſenſe of right and wrong, of juſt and unjuſt. Perhaps there is no moral feeling whatever that is more clearly marked, that works ſtronger in the human breaſt, or that ariſes more inſtantaneouſly than indignation at injury and wrong; a feeling which is plainly natural, and by no means the conſequence of any reflexions upon a public intereſt. Were this ſentiment built only upon views of public utility, as our author contends that it is, there could never prevail among mankind ſo much uniformity of opinion concerning right and wrong. The varying views of utility, produced by the partialities of men for themſelves, their relations, friends, country, *&c.* would be ever varying mens ſentiments of juſtice, according to the different circumſtances of the parties concerned. Of theſe inherent partialities and prejudices no education or enlarged views would ever wholly get the better. Or, ſuppoſing them to be, in ſome caſes, overcome by reaſon,

the matter would not be much altered, conſidering the ſmall number of men ſo happily diſciplined. So that, if uſefulneſs were the only foundation and meaſure of juſtice, the rules of right and wrong would be perpetually ſhifting, according to mens different apprehenſions of a public intereſt. Nor is it here to be overlooked, that many caſes occur in life, in which the conſideration of a public intereſt loſes its whole force, in reſtraining men from injuſtice; particularly with regard to ſecret tranſactions. Suppoſe me, for inſtance, privately truſted by a friend with ſome of his moſt valuable effects; he dies ſuddenly, leaving an overgrown fortune to his heir, who is a miſer or a prodigal: I have a numerous family, hopeful children, upon whom my deceaſed friend's effects would be beſtowed much more for the public good, than upon his heir who, knowing nothing of the matter, ſuffers nothing. Every argument, that can be drawn from utility,

ſeems

ſeems here to juſtify me in retaining theſe effects, by which I ſhall be enabled to give my children a virtuous education and a creditable eſtabliſhment. Here utility unluckily takes the wrong ſide; and if, even in this ſingular caſe, the duty of reſtitution and fulfilling a truſt continues rigidly the ſame as in ordinary caſes, of which no honeſt man will doubt, it follows evidently, that juſtice muſt reſt upon ſome foundation independent of utility.

As it is a very material point, in any ſyſtem of morals, to aſcertain the foundation of juſtice; let us follow our author a little, and ſee what are the arguments he advances in ſupport of his hypotheſis. I cannot help thinking they are altogether inconcluſive. He argues from the ſuppoſition of a golden age, where all the conveniencies of life are in perfect abundance, without need of any labour to procure them; and where the minds of men are animated with per-

perfect friendſhip and generoſity to each other. " Suppoſe ſuch a ſtate," ſays he *, " and it would follow, that men could not " have the leaſt idea of juſtice or ſeparate " property:" From whence he infers, that this virtue derives its exiſtence altogether from its uſe in the preſent intercourſes of mankind. This is a very lame concluſion; for his argument proves no more than, that certain circumſtances are requiſite in order to give the natural ſentiment of juſtice an opportunity of diſplaying itſelf. " Reverſe," ſays our author, † " in any conſiderable circum- " ſtance, the condition of man: produce " extreme abundance or extreme ne- " ceſſity: implant in the human breaſt " moderation and equity, or perfect ra- " paciouſneſs and malice: by rendring " juſtice totally uſeleſs, you thereby to- " tally deſtroy its eſſence, and ſuſpend " its obligation upon mankind." That is, ſuppoſe man no longer to be man; endow him with another nature; place

* Page 34, 35. † Page 41.

him

him in another world; ſuppoſe him no more ſubject to the ſame wants and neceſſities he is now ſubject to: and what follows? Why, no doubt, that, upon ſuch a ſuppoſition, ſeveral of his preſent feelings and ſentiments would become uſeleſs, and have no place. But will any man draw this conſequence, that therefore theſe feelings and ſentiments are not natural to him? Upon the ſame chimerical ſuppoſition of a perfect ſtate, neither would there be any place for ſome exerciſes of benevolence, ſuch as compaſſion; ſeeing there would be no objects of diſtreſs. And yet compaſſion, according to our author's expreſs doctrine, is among thoſe principles which are natural to man. The ſame argument holds for juſtice. "But," ſays he, "in ſome caſes which actually happen "in life, ſuch as that of famine, or a "beſieged city, the diſtinctions of pro-"perty are overthrown, and the obli-"gation to juſtice ceaſes." And what does this prove, but that, in certain caſes

of

of extremity, the great law of ſelf-preſervation takes place of all other principles whatever; which all moraliſts have allowed. It is moſt true, as our author obſerves, that the laws, which direct the exerciſe of juſtice, have always public good for their object; *ſalus populi ſuprema lex.* This, no doubt, ſhews, that juſtice and public good coincide; but will never prove, that we have no ſentiment of juſtice but what ariſes from a reflection on public good. For ſo likewiſe public good directs and limits the exertions of private friendſhip and benevolence; whilſt yet, according to our author's own theory, theſe virtues have a ſeparate and independent foundation in the nature of man. Why then ſhould we deny the ſame foundation to juſtice, when public good has no more authority over the exerciſe of the one than over the exerciſe of the other?

Our author is ſo unlucky in his arguments, that he makes uſe of one which turns,

turns, in my opinion, directly againſt him. It is in his ſecond Appendix; where, profeſſedly ſupporting his hypotheſis concerning juſtice *, he beſtows a great deal of illuſtration to ſhew, That every ſingle act of benevolence carries in it a manifeſt character of utility, or tendency to public good: That this tendency, however, is far from being ſo manifeſt in every ſingle act of juſtice or fidelity: but, That, here, the benefit to the public ariſes from the general obſervation of the rules of juſtice, as a ſcheme concurred in by the whole ſociety: and he adds, That particular acts of juſtice may, ſometimes, be attended with ſuch apparent inconveniencies and evils, as may lead a young inexperienced mind (as in the caſe of *Cyrus*, which he inſtances) to decide in favour of what is unjuſt, under the notion of its being better for the public. Now, if this be the caſe, as plainly it is, this alone clearly ſhews, That juſtice

* Page 215.

can never be an artificial virtue, formed only on a ſenſe of public intereſt: for this public intereſt, to which it is ſuppoſed to be ſubſervient, is, by the author's own reaſoning, an object ſo much out of view, as to be quite inſufficient for ſupporting that general ſenſe of juſtice, which we find prevailing in the world. If our author admits, that benevolence is attended with a natural and immediate approbation, tho' the utility of that virtue, or its tendency to public good, is, in every inſtance, ſo obvious; muſt he not admit, that there is much more reaſon for juſtice being ſupported and recommended by the ſame natural and direct approbation; and that, in the conſtitution of our nature, it would be ſomething extremely prepoſterous, if juſtice were, in this reſpect, left upon a worſe footing than benevolence; both as juſtice is more neceſſary for the ſubſiſtence of ſociety than benevolence, and as the utility of

juſtice, in its ſingle and ſeparate acts, is, by the author's own confeſſion, much leſs obvious and apparent?

But it is needleſs to inſiſt longer on what is ſo evident. You yourſelf, Sir, though you ſeem to have no ſmall partiality for this author, admit, that there is ſomething which appears unſound in his notions of juſtice; and which, you are of opinion, will never pleaſe philoſophers. What will pleaſe philoſophers is indeed not eaſy to ſay, when we find a noble author, who would have taken it very much amiſs not to have been ranked in the philoſophical claſs, I mean the late lord *Bolingbroke* (if a pamphlet, publiſhed not long ago under his name, be truly his) ſeriouſly maintaining, That there is no inſtinct, or innate principle, in men, which prompts them to compaſſion; becauſe travellers tell us, That ſavages and man-eaters ſeem to have as ſtrong an inſtinct for cruelty, as for

compaſſion. But, whatever ſpeculations philoſophers may deviſe concerning theſe matters, in their profound enquiries, if we make an appeal to perſons of plain ſenſe and judgment, they will tell us, with one voice, That both juſtice and compaſſion are natural principles; which, without reaſonings or deductions, either from ſelf love or public good, they find engraven on their hearts.

Having diſcuſſed our author's ſentiments concerning juſtice, I will freely own to you, that there is another part of his ſyſtem which appears to me no leſs exceptionable; I mean that looſe and vague idea of approbation, which he makes to include the whole of the moral feeling, and upon which he founds the diſtinction betwixt virtue and vice. This ſeems to me a capital error running through his whole treatiſe. His notion is, That whatever, in character or conduct, is approved as uſeful,

ful, is virtue; and thus, by reducing morality into the ſame claſs in which we place ſome very trifling qualities, he deſtroys moral diſtinctions altogether. It is to be obſerved, that approbation is a word of a very undetermined ſignification; and the author has never endeavoured to fix its meaning. It is whatever we take pleaſure in; whatever we conſider as uſeful or agreeable. We approve of many inanimate things, in the view of their being uſeful; uſeful herbs, uſeful medicines, houſes, *&c.* Is this ſort of approbation then ſufficient to characteriſe virtue? or may we call theſe inanimate objects virtuous? No *, ſays our author; for, as he tells us, though there is indeed a ſpecies of approbation attending inanimate objects, when beneficial; yet it is ſo weak, and ſo different from the approbation beſtowed upon beneficial magiſtrates or ſtateſmen, that they ought not to be ranked under the ſame claſs or appella-

* Page 75.

tion.

tion. But let us now take a view of that variety of different objects and qualities which he ranks under the ſame claſs of moral approbation; and let us enquire, whether the ſentiments they produce in us do not differ as widely as the approbation of inanimate from that of rational objects.

Firſt, he includes in the claſs of virtues, which are entitled to moral approbation, thoſe qualities of the mind, which are commonly known by the name of intellectual abilities; ſuch as penetration, courage, induſtry, ſecrecy, and the like. This is a pretty wide ſtep: for the greateſt villain may be poſſeſſed of theſe qualities in a very high degree; and it were ſtrange to ſay, that they give him any ſhare of moral deſert. The world, indeed, value theſe qualities, as uſeful to the poſſeſſor: but to call every thing virtue which, upon any account, is valued, or which a man would wiſh to poſſeſs as uſeful, is ſtrangely

ſtrangely altering the uſe of words; to ſay no worſe of it. Nor will the authority of the ancients, whom he affects to repreſent as on his ſide, at all avail him here. For the philoſophers, eſpecially *Cicero*, *Plato* and *Ariſtotle*, when they treat profeſſedly of ſuch virtues as courage, prudence, magnanimity, and the like, always conſider them as moral habits, cultivated for the ſake of worthy and good ends. And as for the hiſtorians, whom he quotes, it is plain that, in drawing characters, they uſe the word *virtue* in a looſe ſenſe, and not with philoſophical accuracy.

But, beſides thoſe qualities which comprehend the higher ſort of abilities, we find our author, bye and bye, extending the moral ſentiment of approbation to qualities of an inferior nature, ſuch as chearfulneſs of temper; politeneſs and good addreſs; wit; decency; and even cleanlineſs. When we find theſe qualities ranked upon a level with the virtues

virtues of benevolence, juſtice, and humanity, we have a ſufficient proof how looſe our author's criterion of approbation is, and how little to be depended upon. But what comes afterwards is aſtoniſhing. He has a ſection expreſly to ſhew, * that the ſentiments of regard which bodily endowments, ſuch as ſtrength and beauty, and which riches and other external goods of fortune produce, coincide, in their nature, with the moral approbation, and reſt upon the ſame foundation, *viz.* the utility of theſe things, or their tendency to produce happineſs. Upon this footing, he ſays, we approve of a rich man, that is, we pay him regard, and prefer him to a poor man; becauſe riches preſent us thoſe ideas of ſatisfaction, plenty, cleanlineſs, *&c.* which are agreeable to the ſocial ſenſe, as conducive to the happineſs of mankind. Nay, not only is our approbation of riches put upon a level with our approbation of virtue, but our au-

* Page 133, & ſeq.

thor

thor deſcends ſo low † as to account, in the ſame way, for that approbation which women pay a man of that make of body, which diſtinguiſhes what is called, to uſe his own phraſe, a *good woman's man*: "a like principle," he adds, "operating more extenſively, is "the general ſource of moral affection "and approbation." I muſt now aſk you, what he has left, to diſtinguiſh the excellency of virtue from the many trifling accompliſhments, which are agreeable or uſeful in the loweſt degree? With how many heterogeneous things has he blended thoſe moral diſtinctions, which mankind have hitherto held ſacred? And does not his theory thereby tend to obſcure and leſſen the dignity of virtue? Our author, indeed, acknowledges the ſentiment of approbation, which we give to ſome of thoſe uſeful qualities, to be, perhaps, inferior, in degree, to that which we give to the virtues of juſtice and humanity: but he con-

* Note, page 135.

tends, however, that the ſentiments are ſimilar, and of the ſame kind. I abſolutely deny that they are ſimilar, or of the ſame kind. One man betrays his truſt; is inhuman to his parents, or falſe and ungrateful to his friend: another man means well, but, through want of diſcretion, frequently blunders; is aukward in his addreſs; or blunt and forbidding in his manner. Compare theſe two together; and I appeal to you, Sir, or to any other man, whether the ſentiment of diſapprobation and blame in the one caſe be not very widely different from what it is in the other; and whether we feel the leaſt of that indignation, with reſpect to the diſagreeable or unpolite man, which we feel with reſpect to the betrayer and the villain? And after all, if morality is to be brought ſo low, I ſee no reaſon for excluding even inanimate objects: if utility is the only characteriſtic of virtue, they muſt be comprehended; as it muſt be owned, that many inanimate objects are much

more

more beneficial than ſeveral of the qualities he ranks under the moral claſs. This conſideration, even in a ſuperficial view, muſt create a ſuſpicion, that our author is not in the right track; and that he has, unwarily, ſuffered himſelf to be miſled, by following an object that has more of ſplendour than of ſubſtance.

It is a particular diſadvantage of our author's theory, that, according to it, no diſtinct account can be given of our obligation to virtue. In his ſection upon this head, he reſolves it into a motive from intereſt, leading us to acquire thoſe laudable qualities which, experience teaches us, are ſo uſeful. This confounds all; and ſhews upon what a weak, or rather, upon what a falſe bottom his hypotheſis is built. For if the word obligation, when applied to morality, has any meaning; if there be any ideas which correſpond to the words *ought* and *ſhould*, they certainly imply ſomething elſe than an intereſted motive:

otherwiſe, the miſer would be under the ſame obligation to increaſe his wealth, which is his notion of intereſt or happineſs, as an honeſt man is to fulfil his word, or pay his debts. Obligation and duty are equivalent terms: and as, according to our author, they extend to all thoſe uſeful qualities which are the ſubject of moral approbation, in his ſenſe of the word; it follows, that it is our duty to be chearful, well bred, witty, or cleanly, which are all moral qualities according to his theory, as much as to be juſt, and honeſt; or, if the obligation is not preciſely in the ſame degree as to both, it is, however, by his ſyſtem, moſt certainly an obligation of the ſame kind. This ſeems to me repugnant to ſound morals, as well as to the common actions of mankind. It is our author's error, from the beginning to the end, to have overlooked thoſe innate feelings of duty; that authority which conſcience carries in itſelf, preſcribing to us certain virtues as a rule or law; upon which

alone

alone morality can be founded and aſcertained. Inſtead of this, he has a looſe and indeterminate approbation, which may be applied to ſo many qualities of the mind, and of ſuch different natures, that it can never aſcertain virtue or found moral obligation.

What you are moſt pleaſed with in this author's performance, you tell me, is his great principle of utility; and you cannot but think he has very happily illuſtrated it, as a key to that general admiration and eſteem which all mankind have for virtue. You think there is ſomething new, and, at the ſame time, ſimple and neat, in this manner of ſtating the foundation of virtue. Not altogether new, I muſt obſerve; for Mr. *Hutchenſon* led the way by reſolving all the ſeveral virtues into benevolence, as our author has done into utility; which, in his ſenſe of it, is much the ſame. That all virtue is uſeful, or has a tendency to promote general happineſs, is what

what no mortal denies: but the queſtion is, whether that approbation, which we give to virtue, is founded upon the ſenſe of this uſeful tendency; and whether even the moſt rude and untaught minds carry this always in view, whenever they approve of an action as virtuous? Is it not, for inſtance, very forced to ſuppoſe, with our author*, that female chaſtity has no other foundation than a ſenſe of the utility of this virtue? That it is a virtue of great advantage to ſociety, and, in that view, highly to be prized, will be readily granted him. But does he really think, that, when the chaſtity of a virtuous woman is attacked, it is nothing but the ſenſe of a public intereſt, and regard to the good of ſociety, that prompts her to maintain her innocence? Beſides education and acquired habits, which I allow to have great influence, is there no ſuch thing as an inſtinct of natural modeſty, or a ſenſe of honour or pride,

* Page 66.

which

which acts as the guardian of chaſtity, independent of all utility?

Indeed, the more I reflect upon it, the more preſumptions occur, that there is ſomething unſound in the manner in which our author applies his principle of utility. Utility, in his ſenſe of it, ſignifies the tendency of every kind of quality, whether to our own happineſs or to the happineſs of others. Now, ſelf-love is, undoubtedly, a ſtronger principle in our nature than ſocial ſympathy; and, therefore, it ſeems clearly to follow, that, if utility be the only, or chief foundation of the moral approbation, qualities, which are uſeful to ourſelves in particular, ought to raiſe a much higher degree of this moral approbation, than qualities uſeful to mankind in general. But this does not hold in fact. Private uſefulneſs raiſes little or no moral approbation, in compariſon of what is raiſed by being uſeful to the public. This is a ſtubborn fact, in-

incapable of being diſguiſed; and, in my apprehenſion, is quite inconſiſtent with our author's theory.

Another preſumption againſt his doctrine is this. Were uſefulneſs the principal foundation of morals, juſtice ought to have a much higher degree of praiſe and approbation attending it, than generoſity, magnanimity, heroiſm, or any of the exalted virtues; becauſe, undoubtedly, juſtice is more uſeful to the world than any of theſe. But the contrary holds good in fact. Matters are, indeed, ſo artfully contrived by the author of our nature, that the tranſgreſſion of juſtice is more ſeverely puniſhed by inward remorſe, and by univerſal blame, than a tranſgreſſion of any of the exalted virtues. But, at the ſame time, it is certain, that theſe exalted virtues ſtand higher, in the praiſe and approbation of mankind, than juſtice: which ſeems clearly to ſhew, that uſefulneſs

s not the chief foundation of that approbation and praiſe.

But, to come nearer to the point, I think it is in my power demonſtrably to evince, That utility cannot poſſibly be any part of the foundation of morals; and, that our author plainly has miſtaken the effect for the cauſe. And here you will not grudge the utmoſt attention, where the purpoſe is to aſcertain the true foundation of morality. To begin with benevolence; with regard to which, the author admits, That it is, in ſome meaſure, the object of an immediate approbation; but, at the ſame time, contends, that "* at leaſt "a part of the merit of benevolence "ariſes from its tendency to promote "the intereſts of our ſpecies, and "beſtow happineſs on human ſociety." This, no doubt, is a very innocent propoſition, and may be indulged in popular diſcourſe. But, in ſtrict reaſoning

* Page 31.

and true philoſophy, it cannot be admitted. By the *merit* of benevolence, our author can mean nothing elſe but the value which we put upon it; the reſpect and eſteem which we have for it. Now, if this be the meaning, it can eaſily be demonſtrated, That the very reverſe of his propoſition is true; *viz.* That the merit of uſefulneſs ariſes from the principle of benevolence. Nothing can be more clear. For, take away the principle of benevolence, where would be the merit of our author's boaſted utility? or what foundation would there be for putting any value upon uſeful actions? To a being that had no benevolence, uſeful, or pernicious actions, would be indifferent: and, to a being thoroughly malicious, actions of a bad tendency would be the moſt grateful. It is inconteſtably clear then, that actions, done to promote the intereſts of our ſpecies, are approved of, upon the principle of benevolence: and, ſo far is

benevolence

benevolence from deriving any part of its merit from uſefulneſs, that, on the contrary, the whole merit of uſefulneſs is derived from benevolence.

Let us apply the ſame ſort of reaſoning to juſtice, which, our author ſtrenuouſly contends, has no foundation whatever, but its uſefulneſs. Before I give my aſſent to this propoſition, the author cannot take it amiſs to have a queſtion or two put to him. The firſt is, To what end is juſtice uſeful? Our author, foreſeeing this queſtion, has given his anſwer in the following words, " That juſtice is uſeful, for " preſerving to every man the peaceable " poſſeſſion of what he has acquired " by his labour and induſtry." Having got ſatisfaction upon this head, I demand again, Whence ariſes the utility of preſerving to every man the peaceable poſſeſſion of what he has acquired by labour and induſtry? The anſwer muſt be, that it ariſes from that peculiar ſatisfaction which every man has, when he

is ſecured in the poſſeſſion of ſuch goods, without being expoſed to violence; for, had he no ſatisfaction of this kind, nor any affection for ſuch goods, the utility would vaniſh. Again, were there no benevolence, would the diſtreſs, which a man feels when his goods are torn from him, give us any concern? Certainly not. Why then is benevolence overlooked in ſearching for the foundation of juſtice? It now clearly appears, not only, that juſtice is ſupported by benevolence, but, conſidered as an uſeful virtue, that it alſo derives part at leaſt of its merit from benevolence.

But further, our author muſt acknowledge a fact which is inconteſtably true, that every man diſtinguiſhes goods acquired by his labour and induſtry, from what he has acquired the poſſeſſion of by fraud, force, or other unjuſtifiable means. With regard to the former, he is conſcious of wrong done him when

when diſpoſſeſſed by violence; he calls ſuch an action robbery: when deprived of the latter by the hands of juſtice, he has no ſuch conſciouſneſs; but rather, that he was treated as he deſerved. At the ſame time, all mankind join with him in theſe ſentiments; and hence that univerſal indignation againſt thoſe who, breaking through all natural reſtraints, are guilty of robbery or theft.

But one ſtep further, my dear Sir, and we ſhall have diſplayed to us in full light the true and ſolid foundation of juſtice. Recollecting what is laid down above, we find, that goods which we have acquired by labour and induſtry, by inheritance, or by other honeſt means, are diſtinguiſhed from all others. We have a peculiar affection for ſuch goods: we have a conſciouſneſs of wrong when deprived of them; and the perſon, who commits the wrong, becomes

becomes the object of our reſentment, and of the indignation of mankind. Here, a relation is eſtabliſhed betwixt us and ſuch goods by the ſtrongeſt natural ſentiments; and this ſingular relation, mankind have agreed to denominate by the word *property*. It is evident then, in the firſt place, that property is founded in the nature of man, antecedently to all poſitive laws and conventions: in the next place, that juſtice derives its force and authority from the ſingular feelings which characterize property; and conſequently, that juſtice reſts upon theſe feelings, as its true and ſolid foundation.

To conclude, the error is the ſame here that our author has unwarily committed, with regard to benevolence. He has endeavoured to invert human nature, by aſſigning that as the cauſe which is truly the effect. " Utility," he ſays, " is the foundation of juſtice,

" and

« and juſtice of property:" whereas, in truth, property, and the natural ſentiments which give it birth, are the foundation of juſtice, as well as of all the utility we aſcribe to it. And, after all, a ſingle reflexion might have made this evident to him. Laying aſide property and the natural ſentiments which produce it, there could be no ſuch thing as injuſtice: we could have no conception of juſtice; and as little of that beauty, merit and uſefulneſs we aſcribe to it.

In handling this ſubject, I would by no means be underſtood to deny, that uſefulneſs, by a reflex act, may become an additional motive to juſtice. I only aſſert, that it is not the foundation of this virtue; which, I think, can be clearly traced back to a primary, original feeling in human nature. The caſe of juſtice, with reſpect to utility, is pretty much the ſame as that of eating and drinking,

drinking, with reſpect to ſelf-preſervation. Nature has provided us with proper appetites, which move us to eat and drink, in the ſame manner, as the feelings of right and wrong move us to do juſtice. Juſtice, it is true, is uſeful, and ſo are eating and drinking; but uſefulneſs is not the foundation or principle of either; though uſefulneſs may ſometimes become an additioual motive to do juſtice, as well as to take nouriſhment when we have no appetite.

The above is ſo agreeable to the natural notions of mankind, that whoever endeavours to eſtabliſh an oppoſite theory, will find it difficult to keep clear of contradictions. Our ingenious author may be taxed with ſomething of this nature. For, reaſoning upon the uſefulneſs of juſtice *, he ſhews it to be the deſign of public laws, to ſecure to every man the peaceable poſſeſſion of his property, the privilege of tranſmitting

* Page 52.

mitting it to his poſterity, and the power of transferring it to others, by mutual conſent. This is, in effect, acknowledging the idea of property to be antecedent to theſe laws, and to be the foundation of them. And yet, in the ſame page, he aſſerts, That *mine* and *thine* have no meaning, but in conſequence of theſe laws. Thus, he makes property the foundation of theſe laws, and theſe laws the foundation of property.

I am not ſurpriſed you ſhould be pleaſed with a work, which, in an elegant dreſs, promiſes a neat and ſimple theory of morals. But, if the above hints ſhall engage you to a more accurate review, I am confident you will diſcover this new theory to be ſlight and altogether unſound. Human nature is a complex machine; and, by a careful inveſtigation of its ſeveral ſprings and movements, it appears

to me, That we are more likely to arrive at a juſt view of morals, as a ſcience, than by eſtabliſhing, too haſtily, a ſingle principle, and building an entire ſyſtem upon it. Any further obſervations of mine you deſire, I ſhall always be ready to communicate, as you know me to be, with ſincere attachment,

SIR,

Your moſt humble Servant.

FINIS.